

Building awareness of pre-service teachers' dispositions - challenges for teacher education

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Abstract

Each and every individual have their own unique idiosyncrasies that they have picked up through life. These “dispositions” are the reasons why we do what we do in any given context. Becoming aware of your dispositions and finding out the reasons why you think and act in a certain way is an important competency to learn in teacher education programmes. Imparting knowledge to students effectively is one of the most fundamental aspects of a teacher’s domain. However, what if this skill wasn’t being effectively taught or assessed? What would be the implications for pre-service teachers not including this aspect sufficiently? Ten articles on the issue surrounding dispositions within education have been used to collate this literature review. The sources used are from journal articles, literature reviews, and education documents. These were found searching by searching the terms “dispositions”, “teacher training”, and “teacher standards.”

Keywords: *dispositions, pre-service teacher, awareness, challenges, graduate standards*



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Introduction

Over the past twenty years, the word disposition has been acknowledged and adopted by education systems across the world. The acknowledgement regarding its importance for pre-service teachers to embody in order to be an effective teacher, has been accepted. There are many countries, to which graduating teacher standards have included dispositions as one of their competencies. The Graduate Teaching Standards in New Zealand recognise that in order to become proficient in teaching, pre-service teachers need to possess this competency. This literature review explores ten articles on the issue surrounding the extent in which dispositions appear, and how they are incorporated within graduate training programmes.

The concept of dispositions

The word disposition has become very popular and widely used by education systems over the last two decades. As a consequence of this, the word has accumulated a plethora of definitions. One of the first, over twenty years ago, in relation to education was that a person’s dispositions can restrict their actions in certain contexts (Katz & Rath, 1985). Whereas, a more contemporary definition suggests that dispositions are deeply rooted characteristics that have been formed by an

individual’s prior experience, values, culture, and intellectual abilities (Stooksberry, Schussler, & Bercaw, 2009). In essence, dispositions distort the information received by others and their actions towards others (Stooksberry et al., 2009). Along with, dispositions being called accidental assumptions that influence the way someone interacts with another (Robinson, 2011). Even though the definition for ‘disposition’ have many interpretations, they all allude to the same viewpoint, that a person’s disposition can affect the way they think and act around different people and contexts, like a two-way filter (Schussler, Bercaw & Stooksberry, 2008).

Effective teaching

Imparting knowledge to students effectively is one of the most fundamental aspects of a teacher’s objective. In order to achieve this, a teacher needs to inspire, motivate, and interact in a meaningful, engaging way towards their students (Ripski, LoCasale-Crouch, & Decker, 2011). Throughout this teaching as inquiry cycle the teacher will be able to engage reciprocally, supporting their students in practice and research within any context while achieving effective outcomes for learners (Aitken, Sinnema & Meyer, 2013). However, if teachers are unaware of the way they conduct themselves through these interactions for example; what they say and how they say it, this could be either

an extremely positive or seriously detrimental impact on the students learning (Sherman, 2006). Being a pre-service teacher, knowing your characteristic traits plays an important role as it makes you conscious of the fact that certain behaviours, choices, and experiences can influence your thinking and actions towards learners (Ripski, et al., 2011). There are no arguments regarding whether or not the qualities of caring, kindness, empathy, and being culturally aware make an effective teacher (Helm, 2006). These dispositions are assumed to be mandatory qualities for pre-service teachers to possess while in teacher training programmes (Sherman, 2006).

Teacher educators' dispositions

Given the complexity of every pre-service teachers own idiosyncrasies, to what extend are they visible enough to assess and evaluate with rubrics in developing an effective teacher? (Sherman, 2006). Teacher educators assessing someone's dispositions can be an extremely personal and perhaps an immoral undertaking. This could prevent teacher educators from questioning behaviour due to the personal context they are in and instead, focus more on documented assessments (Sherman, 2006). This lack of inquiry into pre-service teacher's personal dispositions could produce a deficit within the training programme. Predominately focusing on content and pedagogy may be damaging and even more dangerous than that of a teacher unaware of their own morals that negatively inform their actions (Schussler et al., 2008). For this reason, it is important that graduating teachers habitually recognise and have an awareness that the beliefs they currently hold may negatively affect students that are unlike themselves (Aitken, et al., 2013). Because dispositions are internal and only appear around particular contexts it may be difficult and intrusive for teacher educators to question someone's disposition (Helm, 2006). This disposition within teaching programs needs to be addressed to the Graduate Teacher Standards because teaching will not move forward as a profession until there is a common curriculum and clear fundamentals around what pre-service teachers should have the opportunity to learn and how they should learn it (Aitken, et al., 2013).

So what do the Standards say?

The importance of dispositions within the education system have been achieved and included in the New Zealand's Graduate Teacher Standards. However, positioned as standard six, part b, under Professional Values and Relationships. The teaching standards are arranged in three disciplines - professional knowledge, as mentioned, professional practice, and professional values and relationships and each discipline has their allocated standards (Education Council, 2015). This arrangement could imply a ranking system, however, to some, it gives an emphasis that there is disconnect and difference between each discipline (Aitken et al., 2013). These personal preconceptions of the standards could influence prioritising standards over others. The separate treatment of all three disciplines suggests a danger of what is happening in education programs in that teacher education programs focus on content and pedagogy for pre-service teachers due to the standards, rather than process-related aspects of teaching such as dispositions (Sherman, 2006). In the Graduate Standards it only states that you need to have "dispositions to work effectively",

but neglects to be specific of which ones (Education Council, 2015).

The New Zealand Curriculum also acknowledges graduate teachers dispositions however, nothing regarding an importance in challenging their own negative dispositional views of diversity (Aitken et al., 2013). Instead, the document says, "that graduating teachers need to develop an understanding of their own identity, language and culture, and of the relevance of culture in education" (Education Council, 2015). Given the interaction and responsibilities that pre-service teachers have towards their students on professional placement, should be mentioned and play a part in the other two graduating standards. The Graduate Standards of New Zealand need to avoid treating every standard separately (Aitken, et al., 2013) and consider the braided approach of dispositions as identified in the New Zealand Curriculum where "Māori and Pākehā recognise each other as full Treaty partners, and in which all cultures are valued for the contribution's they bring" (Ministry of Education, 2012, p. 8).

Implications for dispositions

The literature portrays a need for a more in depth, holistic approach into teaching dispositions to graduates within teaching programs. The importance of deeper knowledge of learning about themselves by ways of applying a continual process to improve success in being a prospective teacher (Aitken et al., 2013). Without emphasis on these processes initial teacher training will be compromised (Aitken et al., 2013). Equally important, is that the Graduate Standards need to specify coherently the dispositions that are imperative to being an effective teacher for all learners.

Conclusion

Consideration should be taken with regards to the similarity of perspectives within this review. This could suggest either a consensus in the literature or the depth of the search. Simply possessing only knowledge and understanding of our dispositions is not enough. Student teachers dispositions need to be understood, developed and continually challenged if they are to continue to refrain from making assumptions stemmed from their own dispositions towards students unlike themselves. By challenging oneself, it uncovers all the assumptions that arose from our pre-existing ideas and experiences. This cycle of problem solving will have a great impact on the decision making and actions of teachers (Aitken et al., 2013).

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